

The Hon.^d Henry Johnstone

SERIOUS REFLECTIONS
UPON THE
PRESENT STATE AND SITUATION
OF THE
BRITISH SUGAR COLONIES;
ADDRESSED TO ALL THE
PROPRIETORS
THEREIN.

Melius, Pejus, Profit, Obfit, nil vident nisi quod Lubent.

TERENCE.



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SERIOUS REFLECTIONS

OF THE

PRESENT STATE AND SITUATION

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESSED TO ALL THE

MEMBERS



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SERIOUS REFLECTIONS, &c.

Quemadmodum non uno Supplicio dignus est, qui Fontem Publicum, unde bibant Omnes, Veneno inficit; ita Nocentissimus est, qui Principis Animum pravis infecerit Opinibus, Quæ, mox, in Tot Hominum Perniciem redundant.

PLUT. Mor. p. 383.

T is a remark, worthy of the learned Author, above quoted, that a flatterer is the publick enemy of mankind, who endeavours to render every man his own deceiver, and keeps him ignorant of himself, by which means the good never arrive at perfection and the bad never mend.

Of all the cameleon arts of this most detestable vice, none will be found so subtle, nor yet so pregnant with accumulative mischief, as that which tends to disguise, or extenuate the errors of publick measures, by furnishing the passions with arguments to defend their excesses, or to justify the several abuses of their power. To give a colour of justice to severity, to introduce specious palliatives in aid of oppression, and to blend the rights of the constitution with unconstitutional innovations, are artifices, which have been, but too frequently, exerted by such miscreants, in all ages, to mislead the judg-

ment of the publick, in order to conciliate to themselves the favour of the Sovereign, or countenance of his Ministers.

Whether to this, or to whatever other cause are to be attributed the wild rhapsodies, and incoherent arguments, which have been, not long since, given to the publick under the signature of a Noble Peer of the Realm of Great-Britain, I shall not presume to determine; sorry I am to observe that their influence and effects upon our late publick Councils are too visible, and at this moment too lamentably felt to be doubted. At any other time, than the present, when the passions of the Mother Country have been, and still are irritated against her unfortunate Colonies, and when the calm voice of reason is drown'd in the clamour of resentment, such a production would, unheeded, and unnoticed, have pass'd its hour in harmless innocence, previous to its consignment to an everlasting oblivion: circumstanced, however unluckily as these times are, a very different fate, and unmerited good fortune have attended this merely time-serving mischievous pamphlet. It has contributed not a little, I apprehend, to give birth to a strange political foetus,* or rather an embryo of wanton extravagancy, as unnatural in its form and com-

* Vide Commercial Treaty with France; the effects of which wear a very doubtful and problematical aspect. If we consider the very important naval figure, which that nation exhibited last war, both as to the number of her ships of war, and increase of seamen, we shall not be surprized at her anxiety to render her foreign commerce more extensive than it has formerly been. Sensible as that wise Government must, at this day, be of the consequence of augmenting her naval strength in order to become a match for Great Britain, we cannot be at a loss to discover her real motives for this Commercial Alliance. At all events a sacrifice of every principle of the Navigation Act appears in almost every clause thereof.

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plexion, 'as, I fear, it will prove heterogeneous to the true spirit, principle, and disposition of the Parent Country.

It is an observation, sanctified by woful experience, that the British Nation has ever lost, by Treaties, what she had gain'd by her Valour. Self-evident as this melancholy truism has appear'd in the English history, in all ages, it becomes no less a subject of surprize, that no attempts have hitherto been made, to investigate and solve the cause of so singular a phenomenon, in order to apply some effectual check to the future progress of an evil of so portentous an aspect.

Nature, surely, has not been less bountiful of her endowments to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, than to the rest of Europe. The soil of foreign countries does not produce better understandings, (says an ingenious Writer) than that of England: Learning flourishes with us, as much as among them; our people have wits as sharp, nevertheless whenever we come to treat with them, they are always too subtle for us.

Whatever is the cause of this unaccountable problem, the womb of time only can develope: The present, I am concerned to add, furnishes little or no prospect of a cure to this impending mischief. Formerly, indeed, our plain, and honest ancestors, sensible (as we are told) of their inequality to cope with foreign states, in the cabinet, were slow, and cautious to conclude new treaties, or to abrogate, or change old ones, without some manifest proof first had, of their real efficacy. Long experience had repeatedly taught them the folly and vanity of hazarding innovations upon old approved systems, though, perhaps, liable to many abuses: For they well knew, that no remedies were so dangerous as those which attempt a sudden

sudden and immediate reformation: They were, therefore, better satisfied to bear some inconveniences in their political œconomy, rather than be always tampering with the same, and risking novel experiments for remedy thereof. It sufficed, that their sagacity had enabled them to discover that the natural genius, and active spirit of their nation, together with their insular situation, was evidently calculated for, and led to trade, and navigation. Sensible of this important truth, every encouragement was given, by them, to commerce: Laws of restriction, high duties, and prohibitions were rarely introduced, and then only upon emergent necessity. Aware of the difficulty, as well as inutility, to trace all the circuits of trade, to search out its hidden resources, to discover its original spring, and various courses, and to find out the mutual connections, and dependancies of one traffick upon another, they were satisfied, if, upon the aggregate, the nation had thriven, and had thereby gained strength, power, and dominion. Such appears, from the faithful records of former days, to have been the plain, simple, and uniform conduct of our Ancestors, when they stood unrivaled as a commercial people.

In the present age of state empiricism, and with the present rage for novelty and experiment, the foregoing reflections will have but little weight with the publick, in general, at home. The loss of our American Colonies, added to the mortifying recollection of the amazing sums which were expended by the Mother Country in support of that unfortunate war, has contributed, not a little, to sour the temper of the Landed Interest of Great-Britain, and to create strong prejudices against the Colonies in the minds of the Country Gentlemen; who are easily led by narrow-minded individuals to
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form objections to particulars, without investigation of their principles, or tendency; and to draw hasty conclusions from single instances of abuse, without examination of the whole, and maturely weighing the general balance. To enquire whether we gain or lose by this or that branch of trade, (says *D'Avenant*) is an endless and uncertain speculation; the only question of importance, and which alone should engage the thoughts of all considerate men, is, Do we, in the main, get, or lose? But in this age of state reformers, speculative opinions, and erroneous calculations are daily obtruded upon the publick in direct subversion of old approved maxims, and established truths.

To cite some of those old maxims, and to apply them to the present set of measures, lately adopted by our Rulers at home, and to point out the alarming consequences of such measures, which menace the very annihilation of the Sugar Colonies, is the sole object of the present production, which the Author freely submits to the sober contemplation of the Colonists.

This kingdom (says that respectable Authority *D'Avenant*)* has now prospered, for above a century, by every where extending its traffick as much as possible: and whether a *contrary course* would better our condition, or no, is at least precarious, and eventually uncertain. † That such a specific
trade

* *D'Avenant* wrote An. Dom. 1698.

† The above ingenious Author illustrates his Hypothesis in the following words: "One dealing (he observes) may be thought hurtful, but the lay-
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trade hinders the consumption of our own produ^{ct}; that we get by such and such particular trafficks, and that we lose in the balance, by such and such a country, are matters easily advanced, but more difficult to be proved than is vulgarly imagined. And yet, notwithstanding the above respectable Authority, the trade of these Colonies is now confined within so narrow a channel, and that so restricted as to amount to, almost, a total prohibition. We are driven to the cruel alternative either to receive the necessary articles of flour, lumber, &c. from the *British* Colonies in America, who are, at present, *in no condition, whatever*, to supply us, or we must send shipping of our own, *which we have not, and cannot, at present, procure*, to the States of America for those supplies. Our Rum,* which is our great and only means of defraying the heavy

“ ing it aside may determine another which brings apparent profit. We
 “ bring from one place matters for luxury, but our use of them may bring
 “ them into such vogue as to occasion our vending, in other parts, three
 “ times the quantity we consume our selves, by which the nation is a gainer
 “ —We deal perhaps with one country, to a loss, but this may be the cause
 “ of, or lets us into another trade in another region by which we gain. We
 “ have lost in the balance with France, but perhaps if we had not dealt with
 “ the French they would not have traded with Spain and Italy: And but
 “ for the traffick between France, Spain, and Italy we probably could not
 “ have enjoyed the commerce so gainful to us with the Spaniards and Italians.
 Tho’ these links and causes of trade are often removed from human
 sight, yet where the salutary effects are clear and evident we ought to be
 satisfied.

* Upon a moderate calculation the quantity of rum made this year, and upon hand, in the windward and leeward Islands only, cannot be less than sixty thousand puncheons, and where we are immediately to find shipping of our own (or English bottoms) for their transportation would puzzle the wisest devisor of ways and means.

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heavy expences of our Estates, we are, now, totally unable to dispose of, for the same reasons; having not the means of conveyance, agreeable to the new regulations of trade now established: and it is notorious that we have no other market upon the globe, America excepted, to resort to, for the disposal of our Leeward Island Rum; and should the States of America, naturally incensed against us, be roused to a spirit of retaliation, and forbid the † exportation of their commodities in British bottoms, the measure of our calamities will be rendered compleat by a famine in these Colonies.

Such is the choice of difficulties and distresses to which the Sugar Islands are now reduced: And what are the salutary consequences, which are to arise to the Mother Country? We are told, in the true language of oppression, that such measures are necessary to the support of the ‡ Navigation Act, which

The little disparity lately made in the duties upon rum and French brandies, must totally discourage the importation of the former article into Great Britain, more particularly the Leeward Island Rum, which by some strange fatality, is held in the least estimation at home.

† I must here remind our Rulers at home, that by a late Act of Parliament whenever flour, corn, and other, therein specified, grain shall exceed a certain price in England, the exportation is prohibited; so that in all human probability, our application home for that necessary article of life, would occasion so great a demand, and consequently so great a rise in its price as to fall within the above predicament, and provisions of that Act.

‡ This momentous objection, which has excited the clamour of our Patriots at home, in consequence of Lord Sheffield's Pamphlet, will be found, upon a candid examination to be a mere chimera of his Lordship's own brain. For in fact, Great Britain has never yet been in the possession of the carrying

which is the main-stay of the British Empire; and that, therefore, the interest of the Colonies must yield to so important a consideration. That is, in other words, The future welfare of thousands, with their families, is to be wantonly sacrificed to the speculative opinions of an idle, (however noble) modern Empirick: Nay, the very existence of the Sugar Colonies hangs, tremblingly, upon the precarious event of these new-fangled plans, and pedantick conceits. In this awful * moment

trade between America and the Sugar Colonies; and consequently the Navigation Act cannot, in that particular be affected. But admitting this fact to have been otherwise, it cannot be denied but that the same inconveniences, and bad consequences to the Navigation Act, must ensue from the permission granted to American vessels, to sail directly to the Ports of Great Britain: And yet this partial indulgence has never been considered as a subject of complaint; but no sooner is it proposed to communicate the same indulgence to the Colonies, but his Lordship, feeling the dangerous consequences to his darling Navigation Act, immediately sounds the trumpet of alarm. No such danger, however, I will assure his Lordship, is to be apprehended: For it is well known, that the trade between America and the Sugar Colonies is confined to Brigs, Snows, Sloops, and Schooners, which are navigated by a very small number of hands; whereas the trade between Great Britain and America is carried on in large square rigged vessels, that require a much greater number of seamen, who from the nature of the commerce, from one cold climate to another, are much more likely to be hardy and experienced, than any which the Island trade can possibly produce.

* If ever there was a period in the history of the Colonies, big with impending danger, it is surely the present. But of all the experiments which have lately engaged the attention of Government, none challenges more our apprehension and concern, than the plan, now reported to be prepared for parliamentary approbation, of totally abolishing the African trade. To our present pious and immaculate Reformers at home, it seems reserved to discover and correct the heinous and crying sin of enslaving our fellow creatures. A practice which has universally obtained throughout all ages, in every region

ment to the Colonists, it is not, surely, unbecoming the wisdom of Government, to weigh with deliberation, the consequences,

region of the globe, a practice which has received the sanction of above two thousand years experience, without having hitherto incurred any fatal consequences, is, at once, to be totally abrogated, at the risque of sapping the very foundation of our commercial existence. Without entering on so extensive a field of controversy, and which has been so hackney'd, that it is scarce possible to throw a single new light upon the subject: It is sufficient for my present purpose to observe, that from the first discovery of that part of the African coast where the Slave trade is carried on, to the present period, little or no improvement whatever, in the manners or habits of the natives have been effected by their intercourse with the civilized nations of Europe. They have continued as they were first found, in a state of constant warfare, despising the refinements of luxury, and spurning those arts, which have been repeatedly attempted, but in vain, to be introduced among them. The practice of purchasing their prisoners of war, who, prior to the establishment of that trade, were, by their barbarous rites and ceremonies, devoted to the most cruel deaths, surely, cannot be deemed inhuman. And whether upon the abolition of this traffick, they will not recur to their former custom of sacrificing their prisoners to the manes of their departed countrymen, is at least a problematical question, and as such entitled to the consideration of humanity. I forbear to take notice of the idle tales of kidnapping (as it is termed) as they are unworthy the pen of candour and liberality. That all human institutions are liable to abuse; is an axiom so well known and settled at this day, to require demonstration. It is sufficient for the honour of humanity, to assert that such pernicious practices are, or may be corrected, when discovered. I am no advocate for tyranny nor oppression. But I am bold to aver, that the history of mankind has produced no period more favourable to the rights of humanity than the present: And that the British Sugar Colonies in particular do furnish, at this day, the most satisfactory proofs of their great care and attention to the comfort and happiness of their slaves; notwithstanding the late injurious representations which have been published at home to the contrary. Liberty, alas, is now become a mere decoy word, by which crafty and designing individuals ensnare and imbrangle the opinions of honest men in order to gratify publick pique or private resentments. Were I disposed to retort the accusation of inhumanity

quences, to the Mother Country, of a total annihilation of her Sugar Islands. Colonies which constantly employ, at least, five hundred sail of shipping, and ten thousand seamen, abstracted from all consideration of the duties paid to the Crown, the great consumption of English[†] manufactures, together with the great fund of wealth circulated at home by the more opulent Planters, should, at least, have some weight, even in the scale of the Navigation Act. It will not be amiss, here likewise, to submit to the sober consideration of the Landed Gentry of Great-Britain, that to the Colonies they will find themselves ultimately indebted for the present high value of their lands : [†] and

to the Parent State, their late extraordinary dismissal of thousands of those poor unfortunate wretches (to whom they have repeatedly held out protection and asylum), to unknown regions, there, probably to fall a prey to the beasts of the forest, or still greater savages of the country, would furnish ample materials to expatiate upon.

† D'Avenant asserts that he had seen a representation to King Charles the 2d, from the Merchants then interested in the trade of the Colonies, setting forth, that by a just medium, the labour of one hundred negroes was worth 1600*l.* sterling to the Mother Country. Without further examination of this position, I shall only here observe, that upon a moderate calculation, the Sugar Colonies employ above three hundred thousand negroes, who are all clothed with British manufacture, and chiefly fed with English flour, and salt provisions wholly from Scotland and Ireland; together with all their tools and implements of agriculture, which are imported from Great Britain. The expences of the Planter are so great in the aggregate, that I can take upon me to assert that he does not receive two thirds of the neat produce of his sugars, besides the whole amount of his rum expended in the support of his estate.

‡ It is well known (says D'Avenant) that before England became a trading and colonizing nation, their general price of lands was twelve years purchase, and the legal interest of money so high as ten per cent. and so it continued until

and that a reduction of that value will be the inevitable consequence of the ruin of these Colonies, is an inference, par-ratiōe, very fairly deducible from the foregoing premises.

That a Government cannot be maintained without a sufficient fund of revenue, I am very ready to admit; but a revenue is wildly raised, where the people's strength, that must grant, is not duly understood: Taxes and impositions, not contrived with a due attention to the ability, and convenience of the subject, must, in the end, prove burthensome to the State. Where the nature of the commodities to be charged or restricted, and the true channel and consumption of them are not rightly considered, funds granted upon them must become defective, and at last destroy all credit. But, admitting that the taxes be, never so well, contrived and regulated, a Nation, so deeply plunged in debt as is Great-Britain, nothing can support her amazing expences but a foreign commerce, and her Colonies.* That commerce, however, will never answer those great demands, under the trammels and shackles of severe Custom-House restrictions: nor can the Colonies be

until the year 1666, when the value of lands rose, in the best counties, from eighteen to twenty years purchase; and at present it is notorious that estates now sell in the first counties from twenty-eight to forty years purchase, and the interest of money is reduced to five per cent.

* If what has been laid down by almost every writer upon the subject, be true, that trade occasions all manner of ways, a general consumption, draws together a resort of strangers, and is a great increase of inhabitants to all countries exercising the same, surely the commercial intercourse with our Colonies must contribute greatly to our national stock, augment our native strength, and raise a proportionate increase of value upon the landed interest of the kingdom.

enabled

enabled to give the Mother Country effectual aid, under the present discouragement to the vending of her produce, and to the purchase of the necessaries for their support. It surely can never be, from the bankruptcy of her Merchants, nor yet, from the poverty and distresses of her Colonies that Great-Britain can derive her hopes of prosperity and success.

Such is the alarming crisis of the Sugar Colonies: We are, now, arrived at the very verge of the precipice; a few steps farther advanced, and we are irretrievably undone. For if, in addition to our present distresses Free Ports, (as it has lately been propagated abroad) should be granted by Government to Jamaica, and the Bahamas, it requires very little penetration to foresee a great influx of foreign sugars to the English markets; the consequence of which will be so great a reduction in the prices of that † commodity as, under its present enormous duties, will be most effectually productive of ruin to the Planter, and bankruptcy to the Sugar Merchant: a misfortune which will necessarily involve a multitude of individuals: in short, a catastrophe dreadful even to contemplate.

To the extremity of these evils it is now of the utmost importance to the Colonies to apply to Government for speedy succour: What that succour should be I have not the presumption to direct; but at all events the application should be made, with all due and becoming respect for the Parent State,

† I will only here just remark, that the Planter pays in duties, freight, commissions and insurance, to the full amount of twenty shillings sterling per cwt. before he himself can receive one shilling profit from the sale of his sugars.

and without loss of time by the Legislatures of the different Colonies: a perfect agreement, as to the various objects of this application, would, I humbly apprehend, be most conducive to its success: To effect which it will not be improper perhaps to establish Committees of Correspondence throughout all the Windward, as well as Leeward Islands, to regulate and settle these momentous objects, preparatory to their being drawn up in one general Memorial. This is a mere hasty hint given with all due submission to the better judgment of others.

To conclude; our disease, though almost desperate, is not, I trust, without remedy: There is still wisdom and virtue enough to be found in the Cabinet of Great-Britain, upon which we may safely rely for aid and protection. We have a Minister at the helm of affairs who, though young, and inexperienced, is a Prodigy of Nature. A Minister in whom unite such a combination of qualities as history can scarce furnish a parrallel:* Engaged in the service of the Crown, and consequently jealous of its prerogatives, he seems equally mindful of the rights of the subject: Tho' vigilant for the State, he is careless for himself: fearful of doing ill, but undaunted in his career of good actions, he values fame more than riches, and disdains power and greatness which he cannot enjoy with his integrity and patriotism. Such are the self evident features of our young Minister's character, and though he may be led astray, for a time, by the insidious designs of

* This character of Mr. Pitt will, doubtless, by some, be thought extravagant; it is nevertheless the real undisguised sentiments of the Author, upon the fullest conviction of their rectitude.

crafty incendiaries, the delusion cannot be lasting: In some unguarded moment the visor will drop, and one glimpse will be sufficient to satisfy the quickness of his penetration. The time will, I trust, arrive, when he will view these Colonies in a very different light: we have been and still are strangely traduced to the Mother Country, by interested individuals; we have been represented as a cruel, factious, discontented and disloyal people; a band, in short, of Smugglers,* who, in defiance to all laws and good government, are daily robbing the Crown of its just dues. The time however, I hope, is not far distant, when these scandalous reports and illiberal prejudices will be effaced by the solid and lasting impressions of truth and justice. We have had a Prince of our own lately amongst us, possessed of every requisite to detect falsehood, and to vindicate innocence; to him, who has been an eye witness of our political conduct we may look up with confidence for our justification.

Nit conscire nobis, nulla pallescere culpa.

* We are not a little indebted for this character, to the hasty representations of some certain Naval Characters, lately upon this station: but as one has just paid the last debt of nature, and another very likely to follow speedily, I shall forbear further particulars. I cannot however but lament, among many other bad consequences of these new commercial regulations, the melancholy prospect of depravation which is but too likely to ensue to the prejudice of our naval character, by this novel appointment of her Officers to Custom-house commissions.



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